

SCHOOL DISTRICT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

Minutes of Meeting
Wednesday, May 3, 2006
Phoenix College, Phoenix

Commissioner George Martinez called the meeting to order at 6.32 p.m. and attendance was noted by the secretary.

Members Present

Martin Shultz, Chairman
George A. Martinez, Co-Chair
Vicki Anderson
Dr. Sandra Dowling
Doris Goodale
Art Harding
Michael Hunter
Rita Leyva
Kent Scribner
Joseph Thomas

Members Absent

Jay Blanchard
Dave Naugle
Thomas Schoaf

Speakers Present

Dr. Cathy Stafford, Avondale Elementary School District
Rae Wafers, Kyrene & ASBA
Dave Perey, Bicentennial Union School District #16
L. Thomas Heck, ED.D., Litchfield Elementary School District
Mitzi Epstein, Kyrene Elementary School District #28
Evelyn Shapire, herself & community
Suzanne Schweiger-Nitchals, family, neighborhood & Creighton School District
John M. Carpenter, Phoenix Elementary School District, #1
Paul Mohr, Murphy
Mary Ann Rosehnal, herself, Morristown School District, Site Council ASA Member
Clara G. Vinzant, Paloma School District
Paul Vinzant
Tee Lambert
Kevin Brackney, Show Low Unified School District

Introductions And Remarks

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair George A. Martinez at 6.32 pm. Approximately forty members of the public were in attendance. Dr. Anna Solley, President of Phoenix College, offered opening remarks. She stated that she enjoys serving in the heart of Phoenix and that it is the civic duty of Phoenix College to open its doors to hearings such as the one tonight. Chairman Martin Shultz then took to the podium.

Chairman Shultz wanted to ensure that those who attended would become acquainted with the Commission and their charge. He introduced Senator Linda Gray who was also in attendance. Afterward, the individual commissioners introduced themselves, and then each of the persons in the audience introduced themselves.

Chairman Shultz gave a brief presentation about the Commission, introducing how the Commission intends to work over the next few months and years, until the maps are voted on in November 2008. He also told members of the public that the Dept. of Ed. will send out the research people are interested, in addition to posting it on the website. Mr. Shultz invited the public to the next SDRC meeting on 18 May, 2006, in House Hearing Room 5.

Kevin Brackney took the floor. He stated that he is from Show Low where they have 2400 students. He is here to listen to the Commission and see what they are planning to do. He voiced concern about where the Commission is going; he would like to find out what direction is being taken. What districts will be affected? Moreover, the Show Low budget is quite tight. Show Low has hired regular education teachers to teach special education and hopes that they do not get into trouble. There are a number of issues that hurt rural schools like his. For instance, busing students from long distances is one of those hardships. He wonders if redistricting will benefit his school.

Chairman Shultz responds. The statute makes clear that we are only to look at non-unified school districts. In Arizona there are small districts and schools where the law of economics will apply. The SDRC will try to be sensitive to that.

Kevin Brackney speaks again. He understands the law of economics, but he also knows what it is like to be in both big schools and rural schools. He does not want to lose the personal side of education in rural schools if they are to be unified.

Chairman Schultz states that school districts do not have to wait for the Commission. They can make their own initiative and put it on the ballot.

Kevin Brackney asks if they are looking at charter schools.

Chairman Shultz states that the SDRC does not have any statutory authority to look at charter schools. The statute can be amended to add charter schools. If individuals would like that, they should contact people like Senator Gray.

Tee Lambert then takes the floor. She is concerned about joining school districts, changing demographics, which will in turn affect federal dollar disbursement. She asked if they would be voting by county. She asked whether the unification scheme will be voted by school districts.

Chairman Shultz answers that each affected school district would have to vote in the affirmative to create unification.

Tee Lambert asked whether the charge is limited to only joining K-8 districts.

Commissioner Dowling responded that the job of the SDRC is to look at everything from demographics to federal impact. The Commission will take it seriously since they represent the State. They are willing to go to rural areas to understand the issues in those communities. This is not a consolidation commission.

Clara Vinzant then took the floor. She stated that she is from a rural school, ten miles west of Gila Bend. Her issue is the possibility of being forced to redistrict with a school that is failing. She would like to look to rural schools knowing that urbanization is in the background. Schools will grow. She hopes the Commission will consider a lengthier time to building high schools that service rural areas. She would also like to offer salary incentives to get teachers to the rural areas.

Commissioner Thomas offered these words: Adding failing schools that live next door into a district is an interesting issue. It is a shame that states cannot be named failing because then there would be funding. He sees three overlapping issues: (1) financial concerns; (2) curricular issues; (3) local control. If you are going back to your community, talk about how change will affect you. Change will not always be bad. Further, everyone's initial reaction will be resistant to change, but we must keep our students the priority.

Co-chair Martinez responded that we are looking at curricular alignment and where it makes sense to do so and where it does not.

Commissioner Dowling responded that if we are looking at salary; let us know where you are at and what you believe that we can do to help bolster and attract candidates in rural areas.

Clara Vinzant responded that the base salary is \$27,500; that she has five teachers in her district. Three of those teachers live in the community, and two commute from Casa Grande. Gas stipends or providing housing are the kinds of incentives that might attract teachers.

Mary Ann Rosehnal spoke next regarding districts that have rapid growth. If we are combined with another district, some of the positive things that had been going on will be watered down.

Paul Mohr spoke next. He used to be an assistant superintendent in Mesa; before that he was an elementary and secondary education principal. He has worked in a unified school district where it appears that the secondary education issues eclipsed the elementary level issues. A system must be developed such that elementary values will be prioritized. Furthermore, consideration should be given to labor intensive issues in suburban school districts. Will all schools be supported or just those with the most needs? In essence, when you create unified school districts, it becomes somewhat impersonal. All of the issues cannot be accomplished without prioritizing them.

Commissioner Goodale said that being part of a district that has recently unified, it takes a lot of dialogue and communication. Even as of last night, her district was still trying to develop issues between the elementary school and high school, such as the length of contract days. The process will go on, and the dialogue must go on as well.

John Carpenter spoke next. He encouraged the Commission to look at the history of education in Arizona when coming up with the plans. He worries about small districts, like Roosevelt, and how he does not want underperforming schools. He is from Phoenix Elementary School District #1. He would not want to be a board member to take on that kind of responsibility. Districts are constantly losing schools due to issues of enrollment or because they are failing. Moreover, an auditor has told them that they need to close three more schools. We need to get a unified salary schedule so that all the districts can attract good teachers.

Suzanne Schweiger-Nitchal from Creighton spoke next. What other states are you considering as examples? Diversity in Arizona is good, and we must pay attention to that. She finds it confusing that the state has supported charter schools, which are small and can do wonderful things, giving them lots of leeway, but on the other hand, not support small, public schools. Creighton has about 8300 students; sometimes that number falls, sometimes it rises. It is really diverse, not with just Spanish speakers. She is afraid that diversity will be lost if you are worried about what happens in high school. It is tough to teach students to read; poverty is the main problem. She likes the fact that she is in a small, rural area. She is able to see people in her community at the grocery store and give them individual treatment. She wonders about teacher salaries. How will the State pay for the higher salary? Who will pay for the voting? She worries about not being able to voice her opinion on an election issue; she must be neutral.

Senator Gray responded that S.B. 1094 was passed so that a school district could lower the election cost. Planned it to take effect in November so that the cost would be de minimus for school districts. You no longer have to send a pamphlet to every registered voter, only to each household.

Evelyn Shapire stated that is here for the community and working hard for it. She would not like the SDRC to unify schools. She will not support the program.

Mitzy Epstein asked the Commission what it means to say that an individual is American. You might come up with a fantastic proposal, but you must consider the sense of identity – local control, quality, etc.

Commissioner Dowling responded by asking whether the process will hinder us or not. Have discussions in your communities. How do we get beyond losing identity? Do we take away the names of the communities?

Mitzy Epstein responded that she thinks that is important, and that you cannot have a one-size fits all answer.

Tom Heck of Agua Fria spoke next. He had a couple of comments to the PowerPoint presentation better, such as by providing the total budget so that we can see what percentage the administration is. Mr. Heck has read all of the research. He has been unable to find good research that says it is good for student achievement. With that said, Mr. Heck has tried to look at it in a clear-headed manner. If it is better for the kids, then we should do it. He has given a list of the pros and cons to Commission Schoaf.

Comments from Board Members

Commission Anderson: There is an obvious problem between elementary and secondary education schools. She notices that people are coming from different backgrounds – such as those that can meet their parents at local stores. That will not change with unification since the school and parents will always be there. Where are the parents? Where are the teachers? How will you and the administrators inform the parents and teachers of what is going on? You cannot take sides on the school issues, but you can at least inform them. For those afraid of local control, you still will have school boards.

Dave Kerry of the public asked for clarification of the statute that states if a vote fails, there will be another.

Commissioner Harding answered that if School A, School B, and District C were to be unified and it was on a ballot, if School B dissented, School B would be removed such that School A and District C could still vote at the next election to be unified.

Chairman Shultz in answering some public questions stated that he does not have the authority to incorporate a unified district into their plans. If people start feeling more comfortable about doing what is best for their community, it might be that unified district will have to make a separate decision before it goes to the voters. Generally speaking, this is not about unified districts.

A person from the audience asked how will the Commission vote on the plan when it is completed.

Chairman Shultz responded that is the big question of the Commission. Through the use of the ASU Decision Theater, it is hoped that the word will get out to the public. The

process will be transparent so hopefully everyone will be kept informed of what to expect.

Without objection the meeting adjourned at 8.15 pm.

Submitted by Sharon Ng